

Review of A. B. Taylor (ed.) *Shakespeare's Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the plays and poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). ISBN 0-521-77192-7

As John W. Velz reminds us here, "80 per cent of Shakespeare's mythological allusions are from Ovid" and the remainder almost all from Virgil (p. 181), so the *Metamorphoses* necessarily looms large in thinking about Shakespeare's use of myths. Niall Rudd suggests that Flute-as-Thisbe's miscalling Ninus's tomb "Ninny's tomb" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.1.91) was a joke most likely prompted by the dramatist's reading of Ovid's Latin ("*ad busta Nini*"), not Arthur Golding's English translation (p. 116). On the other hand, Golding's phrasing of Pyramus and Thisbe's plan "To steale out of their fathers house" and meet "without the towne" resurfaces in Lysander's proposal to Hermia: "Steal forth thy father's house" to meet "a league without the town" (1.1.164-5); in Shakespeare's mind the farcical lovers were connected to the serious ones. Many such delightful insights are to be found here.

Other contributors are concerned with method. A. D. Nuttall objects to the fashionable formalism which treats as ironic all dramatic self-reflexivity, as when Paulina, Pygmalion-like, apparently brings a statue to life in *The Winter's Tale* (p. 114-7) while Charles Martindale addresses our common assumption that the context of a passage alluded to or imitated is relevant to our understanding of the allusion or imitation. We should not assume this: the Elizabethans liked commonplace books which decontextualized and recontextualized favourite passages, categorizing thematically into such groups as 'passages about sleep' (p. 201). These fine essays of classical/Renaissance scholarship engage with and further the work of Jonathan Bate's *Shakespeare and Ovid* (1993). Like Sarah Annes Brown's *The Metamorphosis of Ovid* (1999) this book makes considerable demands of the reader and repays them handsomely. Anyone with an interest in Shakespeare's poetical debts would benefit from this book, but advanced undergraduate and postgraduate readers and their teachers will get the most from its riches.

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300 words